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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a study of curriculum consonance (correspondence between teachers' goals, what ensues in the classroom, and what students learn) in three tenth-grade social studies classrooms. The three teachers had about the same number of years of teaching experience and educational attainment, and they were about the same age. The classrooms were observed for four weeks in each case, and descriptions and impressions of classroom life were recorded. Informal interviews were also held with the students. Three major places in the curriculum where consonance was jeopardized were identfied. In one case, consonance was lost within the intended curriculum--the aims held by two of the teachers were inconsistent with their specific curriculum plans. Consonance was also jeopardized in the translation of intentions into classroom events. A third source of dissonance in the three classrooms was conflict between the explicit and implicit curricula. These factors are analyzed and a discussion is presented on the implications of the findings for educational evaluation, teacher supervision, and curriculum decision making. (JD)

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How Do Teachers' Intentions Influence What Teachers Actually Teach and What Students Experience? 1

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When we talk about the process of schooling, we naturally assume a considerable degree of curriculum consonance. That is, we assume considerable correspondence between teachers' goals, what ensues in the classroom, and what students learn. If we did not make this assumption, curriculum planning and most educational policymaking would be pointless activities. After all, the point of educational planning is, in some way, to influence what students and teachers do in school, and what students learn there.

Nevertheless, it is plain that there is low consonance in some classrooms. Indeed, occasionally we hear of cases where there is almost no correspondence between the teacher's goals and and what students learn. This paper draws on a study of curriculum consonance in three, tenth-grade, social studies classrooms.

While the term "curriculum consonance" is new, it describes familiar relationships. These relationships have received only piecemeal attention in the literature. My aim in this paper is to suggest three factors that seem to affect the degree of curriculum consonance in classrooms. I will then consider how curriculum consonance can be helpful in educational evaluation, teacher supervision, and improved decision-making in curriculum planning and teaching.

Before proceeding, however, it is worth mentioning that

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curriculum consonance can be conceived in at least two ways. A first way, what I shall call a weak sense, is as a straightforward measure of relationship: How close is the correspondence between aims, classroom events, and outcomes? While such a technical view of consonance may help secure insights into how the curriculum works, it is a limited view nonetheless. It is entirely possible that a curriculum could be consonant in this weak sense, but, because of an impoverished set of aims or miseducational teaching, the curriculum could be substandard, or even harmful.

I am arguing for a second, and stronger, sense of consonance. In this strong sense, we would hope there would be correspondence between aims, classroom processes, and outcomes, but keep in mind that weak consonance does not assure that students will have educational experiences. This would require some appraisal of the quality of the education taking place. Such appraisal demands skills of connoisseurship: the ability to appreciate what is educationally significant.

Study Design

Site selection for this study was powerfully influenced by its aims. The effects of curriculum consonance were likely to be more evident if distracting sources of variance could be controlled as much as possible, and thus, I sought a setting where there were few broad differences between classrooms. I found a school, which I shall call Taylor High, where little but curriculum and instruction differentiated three classrooms from one another. At Taylor, an academically-oriented, northern

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California high school, three men taught American history (Carson, Voisin, and Bauer) and each had about the same number of years of teaching experience, educational attainment, and moreover, each was about the same age. Each man was about to use the same textbook to teach tenth-graders about the United States between the two world wars. Further, social studies classes at Taylor were untracked, and closely comparable in terms of students' academic aptitudes, socio-economic status, and race. Finally, curriculum inclusion decisions were in the individual teacher's hands. Thus, what the teachers planned and did was likely to be the major difference between classrooms.

Data collection at the site involved information about the intended, actualized, and experienced curricula in each classroom. Through pre-instruction interviews, and some analysis of the textbook, I formulated the intended curriculum for each classroom. In these interviews, I explored each teacher's conception of curriculum--what did these teachers see as the educational purpose of teaching youngsters American history? I then inquired into their specific curriculum plans: How did they translate their broad curricular conception into specific goals, learning activities, and instructional plans? From this data, an intended curriculum was constructed for each classroom.

The actualized curriculum for each classroom was compiled from my observation notes. I observed for every day of the unit--about four weeks in each case--and recorded both descriptions and impressions of classroom life. My observations included examination of student tests, assignments, and seatwork; whenever

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possible I spoke informally with students, both in and outside of the classroom. When I later came to construct the actualized curriculum for the classrooms, inferences were corroborated from multiple sources.

The experienced curriculum was the most difficult to uncover. Plainly I could not directly observe what students were thinking, feeling, and learning. Therefore, before the unit, I interviewed academically-representative students from each class, in order to determine what they already knew about America between the wars. After instruction, the same students were interviewed again. I then compared pre and post interviews, and in turn, corroborated this interview information with observation data. This was the basis for the construction of an experienced curriculum for each classroom.

I wrote an educational criticism of each class. In each criticism I explicated the salient educational themes, and related these themes to consonance in the curriculum. Comparison of these three criticisms revealed three major places in the curriculum where consonance was jeopardized. Let me deal with each in turn.

Sources of Dissonance in the Curriculum

The first place where consonance was lost (that is the curriculum was dissonant) was within the intended curriculum. I found that the aims two teachers held were inconsistent with their specific curriculum plans. In other words, these two teachers held conflicting distal and proximate goals. Let me take Mr. Carson as an example. He said that his overarching aim in teaching U.S. history was that his students would learn certain

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cognitive processes such as synthesis and transfer; it is an aspiration that harkens back to the New Social Studies of the 1960's. But when I asked Carson about his intended learning activities, instructional plans, and curriculum materials, they seemed to bear little resemblance to his conception of curriculum. In place of inquiry-oriented activities and materials one might have expected, Carson planned textbook question and answer work and teacher-centered discussion. Thus, there was at least the potential--a potential that, as it turned out, was fulfilled--that the inconsistencies within Carson's intended curriculum would cause problems in the classroom.

The second place where consonance was jeopardized was in the translation of intentions into classroom events. In Mr. Voisin's classroom, for instance, his aim that students would become "harder to fool," learn to think critically, was seldom actualized. During his interview, there had been some reference to specific plans for introducing critical issues in the classroom. But it became apparent when I observed that, insofar as critical thinking did take place, it was generally performed by the teacher. Voisin failed to recognize that critical thinking is something students must do for themselves, and hence a source of dissonance in his curriculum was created.

A third source of dissonance in these three classrooms was conflict between the explicit and implicit curricula. There was a potent implicit curriculum at work in Taylor High, and it placed a premium on academic achievement. Taylor is an exemplar of the suburban, middle class high school--more than 90 percent of

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students continue on to college. But Taylor students are not only college-bound, they are bound for the best colleges. As one might expect, there is an atmosphere of fierce academic competetion, and many students seem driven by the desire for high test scores. Of course, extrinsic reward was not necessarily antithetical to the three teachers' aims, but nonetheless the implicit curriculum often subtly undermined the teachers' intentions. For example, Mr. Carson's cognitive processes orientation assumes students will take intellectual risks such as forming tentative hypotheses. Yet his students were generally more concerned with getting the "right" answers to test items. Thus, there was conflict between the explicit and implicit programs in his class.

But there is evidence to suggest that the conflict between the explicit and the implicit curricula need not be as damaging as it was in Carson's classroom. Mr. Bauer, for instance, had many affective goals for his curriculum. On the face of it, affective goals bear little relationship to SAT scores. But Bauer was careful to promote consonance in his curriculum. His learning activities, teaching plans, curriculum materials, and evaluation procedures were in accord with his goals--and, my student interviews testified--with what students learned. Bauer legitimated that there are many things worth knowing that do not necessarily appear on tests. In this classroom, much more than in Carson's, major educational goals were not endangered by conflict between the implicit and explicit curricula.

The three sources of dissonance I found in these classrooms hold implications for educational evaluation, teacher

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supervision, and curriculum decision-making. I shall now consider these implications.

Curriculum Consonance and Educational Improvement

A first implication of this study is its reaffirmation of the centrality of classroom processes in shaping educational meaning. My findings strongly suggest that what you do in the classroom is what you get. We must not confuse transmission of subject matter with the provision of educational experiences for students. Unless there is consonance between classroom processes and the intended curriculum, then students are likely to learn, at best, a pale shadow of the aims we proclaim. This is a central problem in educational practice. Mr. Voisin, for example, the evidence suggests, is typical in his adherence to laudable aims while maintaining classroom processes that do relatively little to promote them.

A second implication of this study is that curriculum consonance appears helpful for the supervision and evaluation of teachers as well as a vehicle for understanding what is learned in classrooms. It provides a means of starting the evaluative process with the teacher's own intentions. This may be a preferable way to go about teacher evaluation, for teachers often feel that their work is misunderstood by outsiders, and the invitation to begin with the purposes the teacher holds may enhance the dialogue between evaluator and teacher. Moreover, curriculum consonance also provides a valuable way by which the teaching process can be traced from its origins to its

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conclusions, and thus it provides a sensible structure for evaluation and for supervision.

A third implication concerns that we all see through the lens we use to observe a situation or problem. Curriculum consonance provides a lens--it poses significant questions about the structure and qualities of classroom life. In this sense, if employed in the strong sense that I am suggesting, curriculum consonance may serve to awaken us to important educational questions that have heretofore been largely neglected. Consider, for example, the enormous impact of the notion of an "implicit curriculum" on educational research. Recognition of the phenomenon dates back to at least John Dewey , but it was not until the notion was operationalized in empirical research that its potent explanatory power was fully realized.

In conclusion, it is clear that we cannot readily assume high consonance in classrooms, and that dissonance stands between us and the realization of many of our most cherished educational aims. Curriculum consonance seems to have utility as a possible research concept, as a means of making sense of classroom processes and outcomes, and for the supervision and evaluation of teachers. In these ways it may throw into relief significant aspects of educational practice that have escaped previous inquiry. It may, as Dewey put it, contribute to a "reeducation" of our perceptions.

Endnotes

1. This paper will be presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Division B) April 3, 1985. I am grateful to D.C.Phillips,

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Nel Noddings, David Flinders, and Lynda Stone for their criticisms of an earlier draft.

2. Harry F. Wolcott, "The Teacher as an Enemy," In Education and Cultural Process. Ed. George Spindler. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1974.

3. Stephen J. Thornton, "Curriculum Consonance in United States History Classrooms." Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, in process.

4. John Dewey, Experience and Education. New York: Collier Books, 1963,pp.46-47. To be educative, Dewey argues, an experience must be one for which the individual is ready, and it must lead somewhere. These he calls the principle of interaction and the principle of continuity, respectively.

5. Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism was the methodology employed in this study. See Elliot W. Eisner, The Educational Imagination. New York: Macmillan, 1979,chap.11.

6. See John I. Goodlad, A Place Called School. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984, p.230; Theodore Sizer, Horace's Compromise. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984, p.6; Irving Morrissett. Ed. Social Studies in the 1980s. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1982, pp.83-85.

7. See Judith E. Lanier, "Tensions in Teaching Teachers the the Skills of Pedagogy," In Staff Development. Eighty-second Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II. Ed. Gary A. Griffin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

8. John Dewey, Experience.... op.cit., p.48. Dewey's term is "collateral learning."

9. John Dewey, Art as Experience. New York: Collier Books, 1980,p.324.

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